Drow language - FrathWiki

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The **Drow language** is the language of the **Drow**, a people also called Dark Elves. The Drow live in the Underdark of the Forgotten Realms (a game world of the *Dungeons & Dragons* RPG; they also exist in several other *Dungeons & Dragons* settings) and are descendants of Elves who were cast out because they worshipped the evil spider goddess Lolth.

There are actually *two* Drow languages. **Common Drow** or **Low Drow** is the language described in the *Drow Dictionary* found on various web sites (it is apparently one of those texts that have been circulating in the Net for so long that nobody remembers its source). It is a language with a simple grammatical structure not far removed from English, designed to be used easily by non-native speakers (extrafictionally, by roleplayers who play Drow characters). **High Drow**, designed by Jashan A'al, uses the same vocabulary, but has a much more elaborate grammar. It is a richly inflected language, typologically comparable (but not related) to Quenya, with nine noun cases and a set of formal personal pronouns used to address persons of higher rank.

Both Drow languages are fan creations and thus *non-canon*, though a part of the vocabulary has a canon source.

Low Drow

Any closer look at the grammar of **Low Drow** will reveal that the language is actually a relex of English. The grammatical categories are exactly the same and are expressed in ways precisely parallel to the corresponding English categories, imitating even such English idiosyncrasies as the marking of the third person singular on verbs and the homophony of past tense and past participle.

Phonology

The phonology of Low Drow is not specified in the *Drow Dictionary*, but one probably does not err much if one pronounces the language as given for High Drow below.

Morphology

Low Drow is a mostly analytical language, inflecting words for the same categories as English.

Nouns

Nouns are marked for plural with the suffix **-en** (after consonant) or **-n** (after vowel). The only case besides the unmarked form is the possessive, which is formed by a suffix **-s**. If the noun already ends in /s/, the form is not changed, but an apostrophe is written.

Adjectives

The comparative is formed with **-ur**, the superlative with **-url**.

Verbs

The third person singular of the verb carries a suffix **-e**. The past tense is marked with a suffix **-us**; the same form is also the past participle. The future is expressed by the auxiliary verb **orn** and the uninflected form of the verb. A set of perfect tenses is formed with **inbal** 'to have' and past participle. The passive is expressed with 'to be' and past participle.

Syntax

Low Drow has a basic word order Subject Verb Object (SVO), and presumably follows the same syntactic patterns as English.

High Drow

High Drow is a richly inflected language, and to be considered the true language the Drow use among themselves, while Low Drow is a sort of contact language.

The language shows an unmistakable similarity to Quenya in its grammatical typology, though no phyletic relationship to that language - which is spoken in a completely different world, anyway - can be discerned. It sounds much less mellifluously than Quenya, though.

Drow ***Ilythiiri***	
Spoken in:	The Underdark
Conworld:	Forgotten Realms (non-canon)
Total speakers:	
Genealogical classification:	Tel'Quessir **Drow**
Basic word order:	SOV
Morphological type:	fusional
Morphosyntactic alignment:	accusative
Created by:	

Phonology

Consonants

The High Drow language has 24 consonant phonemes, tabulated below. The transcription conventions are given in angle brackets. The phoneme /ks/ is, of course, not really a velar affricate; it is placed in its cell for convenience.

		Labial	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Stops	**Unaspirated**	p <b>	t <d>			k <g>		
	Aspirated	p^h <p>	t^h <t>			k^h <k>		
Affricates	**Voiceless**	pf <ph>	ts <ss>	tʃ <ch>		ks <x>		
	Voiced			dʒ <j>				
Fricatives	**Voiceless**	f <f>	s <s>	ʃ <sh>				h <h>
	Voiced	v <v>	z <z>	ʒ <jh, zh>				
Nasals		m <m>	n <n>					
Liquids			l <l>				ʀ <r>	
Semivowels		w <w>			j <y>			

Vowels

The Drow language has seven monophthongs:

	Front	Central	Back
High	i, ii		u, uu
Mid	e		o
Low		a	

The relationship of /ii/ and /uu/ to /i/ and /u/ varies from dialect to dialect. In some dialects, /ii/ is [wi] and /uu/ is [wu]; in others, the distinction is one between tense and lax.

The vowels transcribed <aa> and <ee> are long vowels. Diphthongs are /au/, /ui/, /ue/ and a rare /ou/, the latter not considered a diphthong by native grammarians.

Morphology

Nouns

High Drow distinguishes between *inanimate* and *animate* nouns, which are declined differently. The inanimate nouns form their plural in **-a** and are thus also called "A-class" nouns. Most animate nouns form their plural in **-en**, **-in** or **-n** and are thus called "N-class" nouns. A few animate nouns pluralize irregularly in the nominative-accusative; all of them refer to Drow or other Elven beings. In the other cases, they pluralize like N-class nouns. Besides the normal plural, there is a *partitive plural*, which expresses that the referents belong to a larger group.

There are nine noun cases: nominative, accusative (mostly the same form as the nominative), dative, genitive, possessive, allative, ablative, locative, instrumental. The difference in meaning between the genitive and the possessive is similar to that of their counterparts in Quenya, or the partitive and genitive in Old Albic: the possessive expresses possession or ownership, the genitive a more general notion of origin, composition or association.

	A-class ***che'el*** **'city'**			**N-class** ***dalhar*** **'child'**		
	Singular	**Plural**	**Partitive plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**	**Partitive plural**
Nom./Acc.	che'el	che'ela	che'elau	dalhar	dalharin	sshadalhar
Dative	che'elesh	che'elesha	che'elsshau	dalharassh	sshasalhar	sshadalharassh
Genitive	che'eles	che'elesa	che'elesau	dalharass	ssadalhar	sshadalharass
Possessive	che'eles	che'elesa	che'elesau	dalharassre	ssradalhar	sshadalharassre

Allative	che'eler	che'elera	che'elerau	dalhararro	rradalhar	sshadalhararro
Ablative	che'elen	che'elena	che'elenau	dalharath	tadalhar	sshadalharath
Locative	che'elel	che'elela	che'elelau	dalharin	dalharinin	sshadalharin
Instrumental	che'eled	che'eleda	che'eledau	dalharand	andadalhar	sshadalharand

Adjectives

Adjectives follow the noun and agree with it in case and number. Sample declension (**olath** 'dark'):

	Singular	Plural
Nom./Acc.	olath	olatha
Dative	olathshe	olathshem
Gen./Poss.	olathse	olathsem
Allative	olathre	olathrem
Ablative	olathne	olathnem
Locative	olathle	olathlem
Instrumental	olathde	olathande

So, 'to the dark city' is **che'eler olathre**, for instance.

The comparative is expressed with the suffix **-ur** (**olathur** 'darker'), the superlative with **-url** (**olathurl** 'darkest').

Adverbs are derived from adjectives with the suffix **-ne** (just **-e** after **n**): **olathne** 'darkly'.

Pronouns

There are personal pronouns for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd person; the 3rd person pronouns distinguish gender (feminine, masculine and generic). In addition, there is a set of formal pronouns for addressing persons of higher rank.

	1st person		2nd person		3rd person feminine		3rd person masculine		3rd person generic		Formal	
	Singular	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**
Nom.	usstau	udos	tau	dos	il	ida	uk	nind	ol	nind	idaes	udaes
Acc.	usst	udosst	tausst	dosst	ilt	idat	ukt	nint	olt	nint	idaest	udaest
Dat.	usstiv	udosstiv	tausstiv	dosstiv	iltiv	idiv	uktiv	nindiv	oltiv	nindiv	idaev	udaev
Gen./Poss.	ussta	udossta	taussta	dossta	ilta	idalta	ukta	ninda	olta	ninda	idaeta	udaeta
Inst.	usstue	udosstue	tausstue	dosstue	iltue	idue	uktue	nindue	oltue	nindue	idue	udue

An additional pronoun is the *proxy pronoun*, which is used when someone acts in someone else's place. It has 1st person and formal forms.

	Singular	Plural
1st person	usstil	udosstil
Formal	idaestil	udaestil

The interrogative pronoun has the following forms:

	Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Gen./Poss.	Instrumental
'who'	vel'uss	vel'usst	vel'usstiv	vel'ussta	vel'usstue
'what' (concrete)	vel'bol	vel'bolst	vel'boliv	vel'bolta	vel'bolue
'what' (abstract)	vel'hyrr	vel'hyrrst	vel'hyrriv	vel'hyrrta	vel'hyrue

	Nominative	Allative	Ablative	Locative	Instrumental
'when'	vel'drav	vel'draver	vel'draven	vel'dravel	

'where'	vel'klar	vel'klara	vel'klarn	vel'klar'l	vel'klard
'why'	vel'inth				vel'inth
'how'	vel'ind				vel'ind

The relative pronouns are similar, but with the stem **ha** instead of **vel**.

	Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Gen./Poss.	Instrumental
'who'	ha'uss	ha'usst	ha'usstiv	ha'ussta	ha'usstue
'what' (concrete)	ha'bol	ha'bolst	ha'boliv	ha'bolta	ha'bolue
'what' (abstract)	ha'hyrr	ha'hyrrst	ha'hyrriv	ha'hyrrta	ha'hyrue

	Nominative	Allative	Ablative	Locative	Instrumental
'when'	ha'drav	ha'draver	ha'draven	ha'dravel	
'where'	ha'klar	ha'klara	ha'klarn	ha'klar'l	ha'klard
'why'	ha'inth				ha'inth
'how'	ha'ind				ha'ind

Verbs

The High Drow verb inflects for tense (present, past, future) and the person and number of the subject. There is also an infinitive and two participles, and an imperative which consists of the bare stem.

Sample conjugation (**khalyrr** 'to trust'):

		Present	Past	Future
Singular	**1st person**	khali	khalusi	khalith
	2nd person	khale	khaluse	khalesh
	3rd person	khal	khalus	khaloss
	Formal	khalazh	khalusazh	khalata
Plural	**1st person**	khalui	khalusui	khalue
	2nd person	khalet	khaluset	khalesst
	3rd person	khalar	khalusar	khalosst
	Formal	khalazhim	khalusazhim	khalatau
Infinitive		khalyrr		
Participle		khal	khalus	
Imperative		khal		

The perfect tenses are formed by placing the particle **xa** before the verb:

- **xa khali** 'I have trusted'
- **xa khalus** 'I had trusted'
- **xa khalith** 'I will have trusted'

The passive is formed with the verb **tlu** 'to be' and past participle.

The conjugation of **tlu** is irregular:

	Present		Past		Future	
	Singular	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**
1st person	uil	uel	tlusi	tlusui	uith	uel
2nd person	phuul	phet	tluse	tluset	phush	pheest
3rd person	zha	zhar	tlus	tlusar	zhaloss	zhalosst

Formal	tluzh	t'zhim	tlusazh	tlusazhim	tant	tatau

There are two types of verb negation. The prefix **ne-** turns the verb into its opposite: **nekhali** 'I distrust'. The particle **naut** corresponds to English 'not': **naut khali** 'I do not trust'. Both can be combined: **naut nekhali** 'I do not distrust'.

Syntax

The rich inflectional morphology of High Drow allows for much freedom in word order. If the subject is first person, the verb goes first; otherwise, SOV word order is the norm. Indirect objects usually precede direct objects. Modifiers, such as adjectives or relative clauses, always follow the noun.

External links

- Drow Dictionary - Low Drow (one of several sites)
- Talentha Ilythiiri - High Drow by Jashan A'al (archived)

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